

Avital Burg

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Textures of Time

Monday – Friday 10.00am -5.30pm

Saturday by appointment

In association with

CREAN & COMPANY

Browse & Darby

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Still life and portraiture

When training to become an artist, Burg practiced all the traditional genres - figurative, landscape, etc - but it was the 'vocabulary' of observational painting that appealed to her the most. For Burg, portraiture and still life are two of the most interesting genres; they enable a greater degree of freedom, and they speak to the 'here and now'.

Burg's work is very centred around ideas of time and place. Recurring motifs include flowers picked from her local neighbourhood, and self-portraits made in her studio. She likens her work to a kind of 'visual journaling' whereby each painting – the title, the subject matter etc – speaks to a certain moment in her life and relates to the very specific context (the 'where and when') of its making. Examples in this exhibition include *The Red Chair*, an ode to the chair she would paint in while pregnant, and *Large Birthday Self Portrait with Sourgrass*, one of her annual birthday self-portraits. Each painting becomes a way of contemplating time, and the passing of it; she often waits to pick the exact same wildflowers year on year at the exact time she knows they will be in bloom.

The relationship between her still life work and portraits and the theme of time manifests itself in several layers. One is the influence of Baroque and Renaissance painters: 'Rembrandt is everything to me', Burg says. She used to take an Old Masters painting and replicate it, often recreating scenes with her own subjects, to study the composition, the light – an influence which remains throughout her work. Secondly, she often paints onto older paintings of her own, and will mix dry paint into the fresh paint, so that her palette becomes a 'topography' of different pigments. 'There is a history within the paint itself', she says, liking to 'evoke the fantasy of the past'.

Materiality of paint

Indeed there is a delicate, multi-dimensional quality to Burg's paintings that speaks to her early tendency towards sculpture. She has always thought of portraits and still-life as sculptural in the way that they pertain to the three-dimensional. There is a line in Jewish poem sung on Yom Kippur, 'As the stone in the hand of the mason', that makes Burg think about dry paint as little stones which she uses to carve out shapes, painting in a sculptural way which aspires to ancient art forms such as masonry.

In recent years, she has made it her 'project' to see how far she can go to recreate sculptural effects just using paint. She incorporates wax to create very physical effects, such as spikes of a crown sticking out of the canvas, or squeezing paint straight from the tube to depict stems and sticks in *Winter Flowers Mccaren Park*. Sometimes her experiments tend towards the illusory. For example, in *Greenpoint Window and Dry Roses* while the bricks are further away in the image, the thickness of the paint draws them closer to the viewer; whereas the body, which in reality would be closer, is depicted flat and created from charcoal, and appears further away.

She describes these experiments as 'games' (à la Jasper Johns) that again come back to the importance of the theme of time. She wants to slow down: herself, the painting and the viewer. By playing around with our perception, her painting demands attention. She also explains that for her, 'the urge to paint comes from wanting to own, or hold a small reality; to have your own little world'. In each painting, she can decide the rules.

On a more general note, she also reflects that her dedication to the tactile, physicality of her pieces is a rebellion against the growing dominion of virtual existences.

Process

Avital generally works on more than one canvas at any given time. They can take anything from days to up to a few weeks to complete. The flower paintings tend to take the shortest; they demand more concentration, and as the flowers change shape and die quickly, she often replaces the bouquet halfway through the painting. This gives their composition a more dynamic, evocative style. The other still lives and portraits are painted in a much more linear fashion.

Training

Avital's training has connected her to a variety of different styles and traditions of painting across the world. She says that she connected much more to the post-war/modern painters of London (Celia Paul, Frank Auerbach, R.B Kitaj, Freud) than New York.

At the Slade in London, Avital was given a spot in the studio that was once Euan Uglow's classroom. Even though the school and its philosophy changed a huge deal since Uglow's days, painting in the same room as him and his students, was enough of an inspirational sojourn, alongside the great teachers who she met there.

She is inspired by the different light that each city has and has aimed to capture its specific effects in her paintings.

She also described her time in California as a ‘transformative’ experience; that’s where she painted her 2019 birthday self-portrait. In that painting, she is wearing a crown of sourgrass flowers which she found there – the exact flowers of Jerusalem.

The exhibition

Avital wouldn’t define this body of work in a specific way; it’s more of a recent collection of paintings that are altogether reflective of her usual themes and practice.

If there is a distinguishing characteristic to them, it might be said that they are reflective of a more experimental approach. For example, she discusses how she used to use oil sticks, pastels, charcoal and pencils as an underpainting or sketching method. But nowadays these have become much more central to the paintings: either she uses them in the later stages of the work, or their presence in the early stages of the work is more laid bare. She is also using a lot of cold wax and encaustic.

She also describes how the composition of her recent works, particularly the flower paintings, has become much more fluid – ‘out of the window’ is the phrase she uses. She relates this to the new experience of being a mother, and her mind often being all over the place, coming through in her painting.

Family and home making is unequivocally important to Avital. Again, drawing deeply on her heritage and traditions, she quotes from 2 Kings 4-10, “Lets us make a small enclosed upper chamber and a place a bed, a table, a chair and a lampstand there for him, so that he can stop there whenever he comes in” *Lamp and Chair*.



I. *Three Colours Morning Glory (Mid Summer, Late Fall 2021 Week 38)*, 2021
oil on canvas

35 x 45 1/2 in. / 88.9 x 115.6 cm



2. *Old Route 82 Parking Violets and Hyacinths*, 2020

oil on canvas

48 x 36 in. / 121.9 x 91.4 cm



3. *Greenpoint Window and Dry Roses*, 2020
oil, charcoal and pastel on linen
40 x 30 in. / 101.6 x 76.2 cm



4. *Wild Chamomile (Kent Avenue)*, 2022
oil on linen
30 x 26 in. / 76.2 x 66 cm



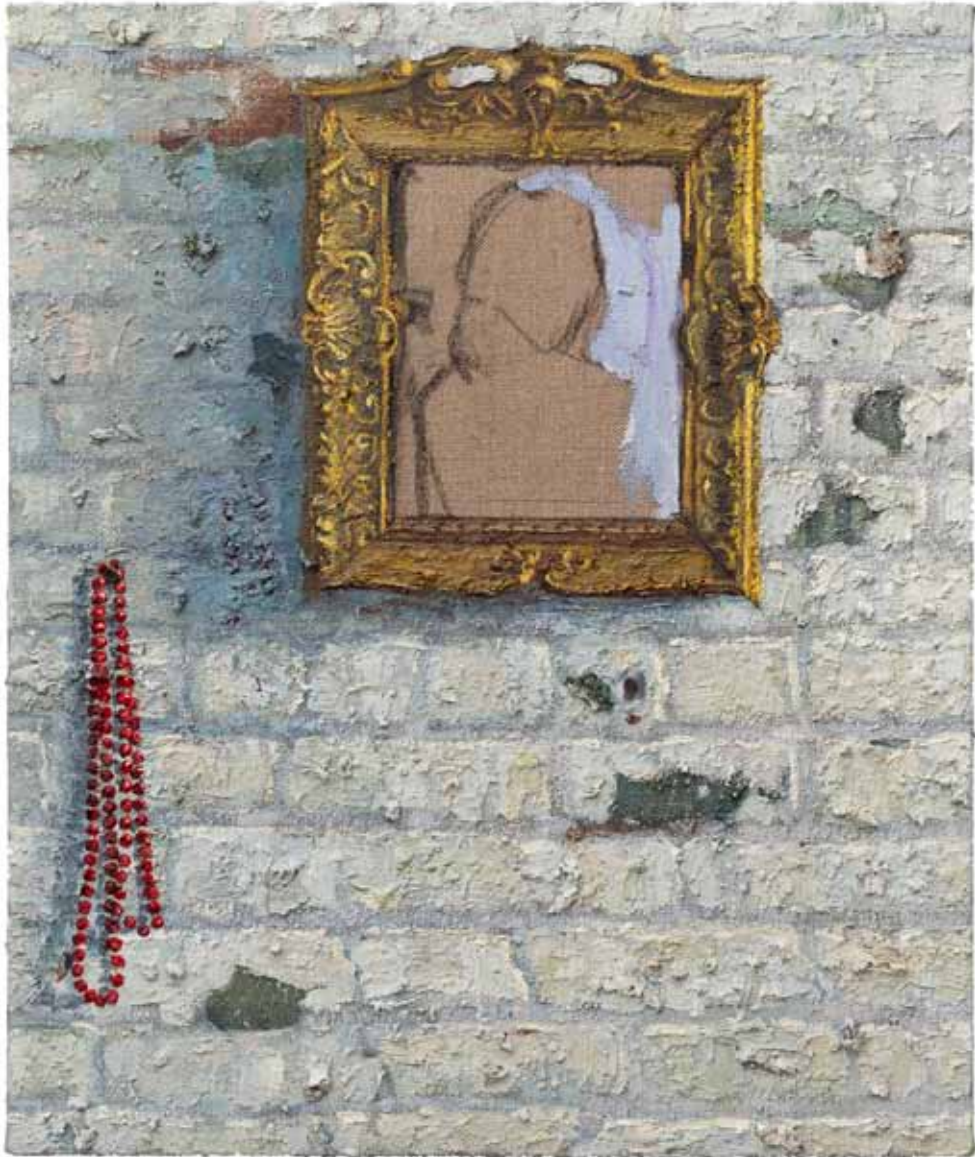
5. *Large Birthday Self Portrait with Sourgrass*, 2019

oil on canvas

30 x 24 in. / 76.2 x 61 cm



6. *Lamp and Chair*, 2022
oil and wax on linen
28 x 24 1/2 in. / 71.1 x 62.2 cm



7. *Golden Frame and Red Rosary on Brick Wall*, 2019

oil on linen

28 1/2 x 24 in. / 72.4 x 61 cm



8. WF Canterbury Bells (Night), 2022
oil on linen
26 1/2 x 25 1/2 in. / 67.3 x 64.8 cm



9. Livingston Driveway Wildflowers, 2022

oil and oil sticks on canvas

24 x 20 in. / 61 x 50.8 cm



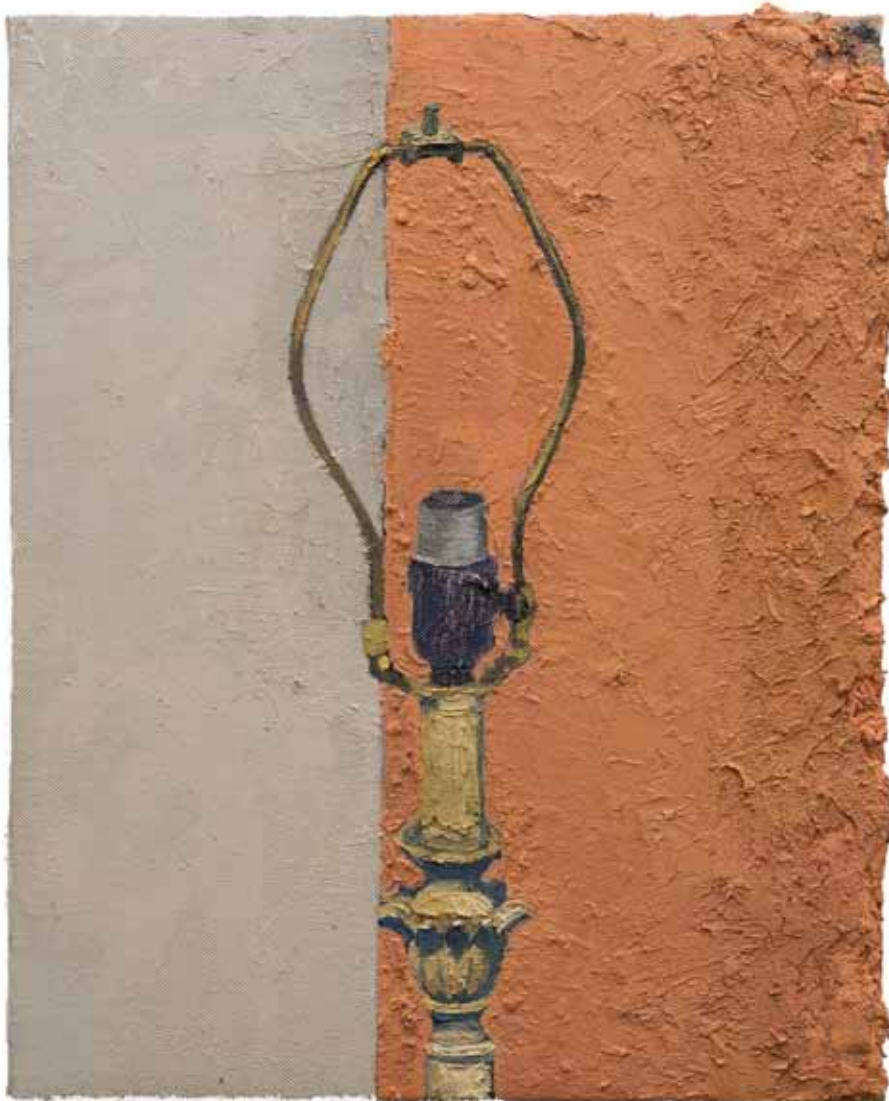
10. Winter Flowers (McCaren Park), 2022

oil on canvas

24 x 20 in. / 61 x 50.8 cm



II. *The Red Chair*, 2022
oil on canvas
36 x 24 in. / 91.4 x 61 cm



12. *Lamp in Corner*, 2022

oil on linen mounted on wood

20 1/2 x 16 1/2 x 4 in. / 52.1 x 41.9 x 10.1 cm



13. *Box at Night*, 2018
oil on canvas
18 x 18 in. / 45.7 x 45.7 cm



14. *Late Fall Flowers (Noble Street)*, 2021

oil on canvas

16 x 16 in. / 40.6 x 40.6 cm



15. McCaren *Pink Branch and Dandelion*, 2022

oil on canvas

18 x 14 in. / 45.7 x 35.6 cm



16. *Penina in Her Old Bedroom*, 2019

oil on canvas

16 x 14 1/2 in. / 40.6 x 36.8 cm



17. *First Spring Flowers (Week 21)*, 2021

oil on canvas

12 x 12 in. / 30.5 x 30.5 cm



18. *Pink, Yellow and Dry Dandelion (Night)*, 2022

oil on linen

12 x 12 in. / 30.5 x 30.5 cm



19 Pulaski Bridge Yellow Flowers, 2020
oil on linen
12 x 12 in. / 30.5 x 30.5 cm



20. *Paidge Avenue Flowers (Week 23)*, 2021
oil on canvas mounted on wood
8 1/2 x 11 in. / 21.6 x 27.9 cm



21 *Ash Street Flowers (Week 33)*, 2021
oil on linen mounted on wood
10 x 8 in. / 25.4 x 20.3 cm



22 *Snow Paper Cup*, 2021
oil on wood
8 x 8 1/4 in. / 20.3 x 21 cm



23. Dupont Street Early Spring Flowers (week 22), 2021
oil on wood
10 x 8in. / 25.4 x 20.3 cm



24 *Cup and Window (Fall)*, 2022
oil on linen mounted on wood
7 1/2 x 7 in. / 19.1 x 17.8 cm



25. Livingston Studio View, 2022

oil on wood

7 x 6 3/4 in. / 17.8 x 17.1 cm



26 WF Flowers Study I, 2022
oil on linen mounted on wood
6 3/4 x 5 in. / 17.1 x 12.7 cm

CATALOGUE

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